

KATE BENTLEY.

BY ELLEN ASHTON.

“Why do you flirt with Alfred!” said Emma Glendroy to her beautiful friend as they sat one afternoon at the house of the former.

“What a question!” replied her companion, “and how on earth could it have come into your head? Here we have sat for half an hour, without a word being spoken, and just when I thought you were lost in abstraction you look up and ask me why I flirt with Alfred,” and Kate Bentley laughed merrily.

“But that is not answering my question. Why do you flirt with Mr. Townsend?”

“Oh! since you will have an answer, it’s because I like to tease the dear man. What a the use of being young and called pretty without one can worry the beaux?”

“But surely, Kate, you would not thus treat the man you intend to marry?”

“And who, my dear little preacher, said I was going to marry Mr. Townsend? Surely I never said so”

“No, Kate, I admit that; but then you know you think more of him than of any one else—for that you can't conceal from one who knows you as intimately as I do.”

“Pshaw! But suppose I do, what then? Can’t one torment a man before marriage?—we all have to be teased enough after it I take my revenge beforehand, and, even if I loved Mr. Townsend, I should plague him woefully before I consented to have him. But what have you seen in my conduct toward the gentleman that induces you to say

I flirt with him?"

"Listen to me, Kate," said her companion. "Every body knows that Alfred loves you—his attentions are so marked that they cannot be mistaken—and your friends give you the credit to believe that you feel his worth," —here Kate looked laughingly at her companion, who paused and added—"at least do not despise him. You' certainly, at times, give him encouragement such as no lady ought to bestow on a gentleman' she would not be willing to marry. But, at other times, you are as cold as an icicle. Again you smile on him; and then you flirt with others. Now, as you know that Mr. Townsend is serious, you ought, if you intend to marry him, at once to cease torturing him; but, if you find you cannot love him, then it becomes your duty to shew him, with all maidenly reserve, but still in a decided manner, that his suit is hopeless. Condemn him, dear Kate, at once to .despair, or else scorn further trifling with the man you love. But to smile oh him today only to frown on him tomorrow, is—disguise it as you will—the part of a heartless flirt."

Kate's color had come and gone more than once during this plain address, and her companion had trembled at every word lest she should give offence by what she felt bound to utter. But when Miss Glendroy had finished, Kate remained a moment silent, and then, rising up, she said, with a merry laugh,

"Well, however, you deserve a medal. Really you preach better than nine-tenths of the modest young men one hears in a pulpit. Surely aunt Mary must be right in saying that you lost your heart to the handsome young minister at the Springs last year—and I suppose you are practising on your friends in the way of exhortation in order to be au fait at the business when you become the Rev. Mrs. Newall, and have to hold forth monthly to the Sunday School. Isn't it so, my pretty preacher?" and Kate put both her hands on Emma's brow, and looked into her eyes until the fair girl blushed in spite of herself. The conversation was not resumed, for the tide had been turned; and Miss Glendroy's well meant expostulation was, as she thought, forgotten.

But it was not so. Kate Bentley, although a gay, wilful creature, had a good heart, and her companion's strictures made an impression on her which she was not willing to admit. Kate's character was a striking one. Pride was one of her dominant fruits. She had moreover a constant flow of spirits, was young, beautiful, and witty. She was courted and caressed by all. She was naturally, therefore, wilful; and perhaps too much given to what she had thoughtlessly considered innocent flirtations.

A few days after this conversation a ball occurred, whose projected magnificence had been the theme of conversation for several weeks. Kate was the belle of the night. Never had her wit seemed more sprightly or her beauty more dazzling. Admiration attended on her every movement. In spite of the resolutions she had formed, after parting from Emma Glendroy, she gave way to her old habit of flirtation, not only dancing with every suitor for that honor, but showering her smiles freely around. Her lover saw this with renewed pain, for although he worshipped Kate almost to idolatry, he was not blind to her faults. He knew she had many good qualities, and he had trusted that time would teach her the folly of her errors. But, on this evening, he almost despaired. He saw her practising all the arts of coquetry merely for the gratification of the passing hour—smiling on those to whom tomorrow she would not deign a look—endeavoring to lure admirers to her shrine only that she might make a sport of their devotion. Townsend could not restrain himself, when he accompanied her homeward, from expressing how deeply his feelings had been hurt. From Kate's conduct toward him, especially during the last few days, he was led to believe that he was not wholly indifferent to her, and he felt it to be his duty to speak to her frankly on the consequences of such conduct. Kate heard him out in silence; but the color faded and deepened constantly on her cheek as he spoke, although, by leaning back in a corner of the carriage, she concealed her countenance. At length she answered him, and her tone was cold and haughty, for her pride was aroused.

“Indeed, Mr. Townsend, you take a liberty which I shall allow to no gentleman, however acceptable he may think,” and she emphasised the word in bitter scorn, “he may have made himself to me. For my conduct I am accountable to myself only—those who do not like it, need not seek my acquaintance.”

A sigh from her companion was her only answer, and the next instant the carriage stopped. Without a word her lover handed her out. Already Kate began to repent what she had said, but pride checked her from retracting it. Coldly Alfred bowed to her, and coldly Kate curtsied in reply; and then she passed into the house determined angrily never again to behold her lover. But, in a minute afterward she hurried to her room, where she burst into tears. They were tears of mingled regret and passion.

When Kate awoke the next morning her first thought was of her conduct toward her lover the night before. She felt that she was wrong. Her pride had passed away, and she determined, when her lover called, to show her penitence by her conduct, and if he alluded to it, frankly to own her error.

But Alfred had received a shock such as he could not speedily forget. He had borne with Kate long, but her bitter scorn of his advice, on the preceding evening, had finally convinced him that her errors were incurable. He resolved never again to enter the presence of one who had spurned every well meant effort for her reformation. He had flattered himself that what he said would be listened to kindly—alas! how had he been deceived.

All that day, and all the ensuing day Kate watched for his coming, until at length her anxiety became nearly insupportable, and her heart fluttered whenever the bell was rung. Still Alfred came not. And when, on the third day, Kate heard that he had left the city for the south, where he expected to remain several months, she felt that it was to avoid her presence that he had gone. Never, before that hour, was she fully aware of the depth of her love for Alfred. So long as he had

been her worshipper, and ever, as it were, in her presence, she had been unconscious of his worth, slighting his delicate attentions, and wringing his noble heart with her thoughtless coquetry. But now he was gone, and forever! This conviction was insupportable to the penitent girl, and she fell into a violent illness, which led her to the very brink of the grave. Her pride was now wholly gone. Oh! what would she not have given to have been able to ask forgiveness of him she had so deeply wronged.

Kate rose from her sick couch an altered being. She was still beautiful; many thought more beautiful than ever; for her countenance now wore a sad, sweet expression, such as it never had in her happier days—an expression which irresistibly interested the beholder in her. Few knew the cause of her illness, and she soon had as many admirers as ever. But no one now charged Kate with coquetry. Firmly but kindly she declined every offer that was made to her; while the time which she once devoted to pleasure was now surrendered to the poor, or to the improvement of her mind.

Two years had passed ere Alfred Townsend found himself once more in his native city. One of the first persons he met was an old friend.

“A hearty welcome to you, Townsend,” said his friend, fervently grasping his hand, “why, you’ve been absent so long that, I’m afraid, you’ve almost forgotten us. There have been some changes among us since you went away, as you may suppose; but we’ll be none the less glad to welcome you back. There’s Harry Smith, and Norton, and Beaufort all married, and I myself am about to become a Benedict. I am very glad you’ve returned, for I was wishing today that I had you here to wait on me.”

Alfred bowed and expressed the happiness he should have in being of any service to his friend, who continued,

“But you little dream who is to be my bride. You recollect Emma Glendroy!”

“Is she your affianced? Then let me congratulate you on having won the sweetest and most amiable of all our old acquaintance.”

“Emma will thank you for the compliment,” said his friend, “but she will be sure to demur to it. Nor can I say but what she will have some truth on her side, although certainly? can’t be expected to admit that there is any one more amiable than my sweet girl.”

“But surely there is no rival to Emma—why we used to call her, by general consent, the loveliest of the set in which we moved I know of no one even approaching to her.”

“But I do.”

“Surely you jest, or my memory betrays me. Who do you mean?”

“Why, who but Kate Bentley, the most amiable and best of girls.”

Alfred had nearly betrayed himself, but checking his emotions, he said, as calmly as he could,

“Kate Bentley!—she was, when I went away, a spoiled coquette. Witty, beautiful, and flattered, she was the very antithesis to lovely and amiable.”

“It may have been—she certainly was very different when she was young, but now—as you will say on seeing her—she is the sweetest of girls. By the bye she is to be bridesmaid to Emma, and I cannot pay you a higher compliment than to assign you Kate as a partner.”

Alfred could not refuse, after having accepted the invitation, and besides, since his friend seemed ignorant of his former love for Kate, he determined to do nothing that might betray him. He felt too by the flutter of his heart that his love for Kate was not wholly eradicated, and he asked himself “if she is really so changed may we not yet be

happy!" Nor will we deny that the fancy, that his abrupt departure may have had some influence in bringing about this reformation, rose up before his mind.

"I have brought you a new beau, Kate," said Emma's betrothed, as he entered the room where the two girls were sitting, "or rather an old one, come to life. Moreover, I have asked him to be your partner at my wedding —have I done right!"

"Oh! yes," said Kate smiling, and little expecting the answer, she added, "but who is he!"

"As noble a fellow as ever breathed. You know him well, Emma—Alfred Townsend."

The blood rushed to Kate's very brow, and she felt her senses reeling; but making a powerful effort to command her feelings, she rose and would have left the room.

"Are you ill, Kate!" said Emma's unthinking lover, but at a glance from his affianced bride he was suddenly silent. Kate rushed from the room followed by Miss Glendroy, and as soon as the door was closed, the overwrought girl fell weeping into her friend's arms.

The next day Alfred, who had learnt all, was at Kate's feet begging forgiveness for the past; but the sweet girl took all the blame on herself, and said it was she who ought to be penitent

"Let us forget the past then, dearest," said he, "and look only to the future."

And Kate answered, smiling through her tears!

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